Gallery
40

Changing Exhibitions
of Contemporary Art

The Cleveland
Museum of Art

Jennifer Bartlett

Jennifer Bartlett: Recent Work
January 28—March 16, 1986

At the age of 44, Jennifer Bartlett is one of the most imaginative and inventive painters of her generation. Her oeuvre has been distinguished by its intelligence, ambition, technical diversity, and adventurousness. Though it often reflects contemporary issues and historic influences, Bartlett's art is highly personal.

In her most recent work, paintings have accompanying three-dimensional objects. The Cleveland Museum of Art has acquired one of these impressive multimedia environments (dating from 1984) and takes the opportunity to inaugurate a series of changing, contemporary exhibitions for Gallery 40 with a small show of Bartlett's current work that includes our recent acquisition. The pieces in this show are a summation of Bartlett's past interests; a forecast of future concerns; and a demonstration of her remarkable talent for juxtaposing a variety of images, media, points of view, styles, and moods. They illuminate her use of analysis and intuition, her preference for planning her themes and subjects and then exploring them in a number of modes of instinctive expression.

In 1968, three years after her graduation from the Yale School of Art and Architecture, Bartlett began to use one-foot-square white-enameled steel plates covered with a silk-screened grid of light gray lines as the foundation for her abstract compositions, which ranged from simple to complex arrangements of dots painted with Testors enamel. The work shared certain characteristics of the Minimalist aesthetic popular in the 1970s in its reliance on preplanned compositions and serial presentation and in its use of simple, object-like surfaces for painting. In 1975-76, this series reached its culmination in a 988-plate, 153-foot-long painting titled *Rhapsody.* Conceived as a long explanatory conversation, it explored a number of formal concerns: line, form, imagery (in this case, limited to a house, tree, mountain, and the ocean), application of color, and artistic influences. John Russell, writing in *The New York Times,* described *Rhapsody* as "the most ambitious single work of art that has come my way since I started to live in New York" and a work that "enlarges our notions of time, and of memory, and of change, and of painting itself."

After *Rhapsody,* Bartlett began to paint on canvas and to mix plates and fabric. Her work became more representational, lyrical, and painterly. In her recent paintings Bartlett has abandoned this multimedia approach in favor of the traditional media of oil on canvas and pastel on paper, with each stroke richly, expressively applied, resulting in some of her most sensitively, skillfully painted works. She has continued to explore a number of her favorite, and frequently used, themes—the passage of time, mood, historic artistic styles, distinctive paint application, and narrative—primarily through the use of the familiar imagery of house, tree, landscape, and ocean. The geometric house that first appeared in her work in 1969 has often reappeared to convey Bartlett's mood. The ocean and swimmer have autobiographic meaning, for Bartlett grew up by the Pacific Ocean and swam frequently. Landscape became a great interest when she spent the winter of 1979-80 in the south of France and began what was to become a series of two hundred drawings of a garden visible from her villa's windows.

Another important influence on Bartlett has been her six public and private commissions for both domestic and foreign sites. These projects have allowed her to further develop her interests and artistic vocabulary. It was in her 1984 commission for Volvo's executive headquarters in Göteborg, Sweden, for example, that Bartlett first introduced three-dimensional objects into her work.

In these recent pieces included in the Museum's show, images that appear in the paintings reappear as volumetric objects placed in front of the canvas, provoking a stimulating dialogue between concept and reality. In a discussion with the critic Roberta Smith, Bartlett declined to call her objects "sculpture" or "three-dimensional images." Rather, she seems to be enlarging upon the possibilities inherent in her work. The three-dimensional objects also fulfill her need to both fill or take over a space totally and incorporate an ever-expanding number of media into her work. Here, some of the materials utilized include painted wood, cast concrete, plaster, tile, aluminum, asphalt roofing, plastic, and shells. Bartlett has followed her imagination, curiosity, and ambition in daring to work with nontraditional materials. The risk has been worth it. Her objects are, in the main, conceptually successful, if not always technically proficient.

The Museum's acquisition, *Sunset and Concrete Dock,* dense with expressive brushwork, depicts a shallow landscape of several trees and a flat, geometric red house at sunset. The moody, romantic, and atmospheric scene (containing references to both nineteenth-century European and American landscape painters) tempts the viewer to compare the mysterious appearance of the shimmering red house—similar to a Monet haystack—with the solid, equally bright houses placed in front of the canvas.

My sincere thanks to Jennifer Bartlett for her assistance with this exhibition. The Museum is indebted to her dealer, the Paula Cooper Gallery—especially Douglas Baxter; the McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery; and the Saatchi Collection, who have so generously lent works.

The environment titled *Sea Wall* is an excellent example of Bartlett's desire and ability to work on a very large scale. In the roughly 7 x 30-foot three-part canvas, five slightly different houses and boats; four flagstones; and a long, low wall and a bench—all expressively and brightly painted—have been placed in a landscape setting. Identical three-dimensional forms are positioned around the canvas. Wandering through this maze-like arrangement, the viewer is confronted with a painted scene that has become real. The large pastel drawing titled *Sea Wall* provides another vantage point from which to take in this complex environment.

Rendered somewhat like an architectural sectional drawing, the painting *Island* shows what is above and below its surface. Though it deals with a number of the artist's familiar themes, this is the show's most mysterious and unsettling work, with its overturned boats and endangered swimmers.

All of these works display Bartlett's ability to infuse common images with a great deal of content and passion; to employ a wide range of media, for the most part skillfully; and to create with overpowering enthusiasm and energy engaging, lyrical, and decorative works of art.

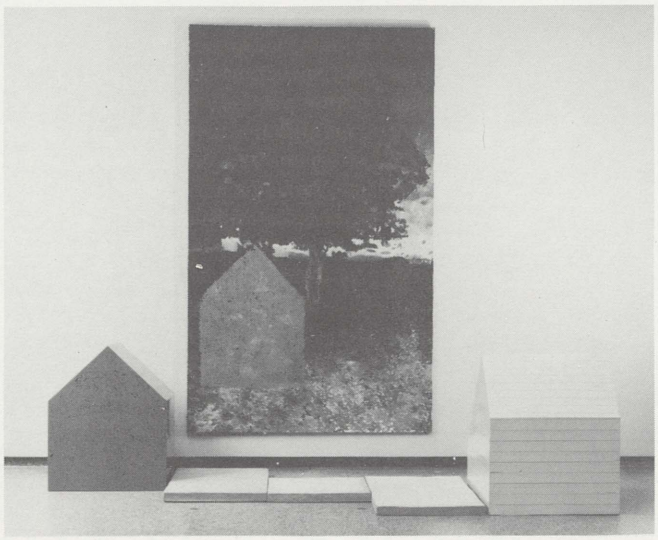
Tom E. Hinson
Curator of Contemporary Art

1. *The Island,* 1984
Oil on canvas, 108 x 156 inches
Saatchi Collection, London

2. *Sunset,* 1984
Oil on canvas, 132 x 84 inches
Concrete Dock, 1984
Red House, painted wood, 36 x 36 x 42 inches; Yellow House, painted wood, 49-1/2 x 36 x 41-1/2 inches; Dock, concrete, each 2-3/4 x 60 x 30 inches (three units)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund 85.206, a-e

3. *Sea Wall,* 1985
Sea Wall, oil on canvas, 84 x 369 inches (three panels); Sea Wall, concrete and steel, 14-1/8 x 241-1/2 x 14 inches (four units); Yellow House, wood and structolite paint, 44-1/4 x 30-3/4 x 30-3/4 inches; Pink House, wood and structolite paint, 44-1/2 x 30-3/4 x 30-3/4 inches; Blue House, wood and structolite paint, 44 x 34-1/2 x 28-1/2 inches; Orange Boat, painted wood, 11-7/8 x 52-1/8 x 21-1/2 inches; Green Boat, painted wood, 14-1/4 x 62-1/2 x 31-3/4 inches; Lavender Boat, painted wood, 11-1/4 x 62-1/2 x 31-3/4 inches; Modern House, wood, tile, plastic, roofing, asphalt roofing, aluminum, and cement, 48-3/4 x 41 x 49-1/2 inches; Duck Boat, painted wood, 11 x 68-1/2 x 29-3/4 inches; Flagstones, each 1-1/2 x 16-1/2 x 17-1/2 inches (four units); Tin-Can House, wood and tin cans, 43-1/4 x 29-3/8 x 49-1/2 inches; Step Boat, painted plywood, 13 x 57-7/8 x 26 inches; Seahorse Bench, concrete, shells, and wood, 30-1/2 x 29 x 20 inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

4. *Sea Wall,* 1985
Pastel on paper, 30 x 132-3/4 inches (three sheets)
Courtesy McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Washington



Sunset and Concrete Dock

Biography

1941 Born in Long Beach, California
1963 Mills College, Oakland, California, B.A.
1964 Yale School of Art and Architecture, B.F.A.
1965 Yale School of Art and Architecture, M.F.A.
Lives and works in New York and Paris

Selected Individual Exhibitions

1970:119 Spring Street, New York
1972: Reese Palley Gallery, New York
1974, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985: Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
1974, 1978: Saman Gallery, Genoa, Italy
1975: John Doyle Gallery, Chicago
1976: Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (*Rhapsody*), traveled to Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut (brochure); University of California, Irvine; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi; Baltimore Museum of Art
1978: Hansen-Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
1979, 1981, 1983: Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1979: The Clocktower, New York; University of Akron, Ohio; Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota
1979, 1983: Heath Gallery, Atlanta
1980: Galerie Mukai, Tokyo; Akron Art Institute, Ohio; The Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Hallwalls, Buffalo (catalogue: introduction and essay by Charlotta Kotik)
1982: Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha (catalogue: text by Holliday T. Day); The Tate Gallery, London (catalogue: foreword by Alan Bowness and introduction by Richard Francis); McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Houston
1983: Gloria Luria Gallery, Bay Harbor Islands, Florida
1984: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts (catalogue: text by Nancy Miller); Long Beach Museum of Art, California; University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley (brochure: essay by Constance Lewallen)
1985: Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, Florida; Knight Gallery, Charlotte, North Carolina; Carpenter + Hochman Gallery, Dallas; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, traveled to Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, and The Brooklyn Museum; will travel in 1986 to La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, California, and Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh (catalogue: foreword by Martin Friedman and essays by Marge Goldwater, Roberta Smith, and Calvin Tomkins)

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Perrone, Jeff. "Jennifer Bartlett: New Paintings." *Arts Magazine* 58 (December 1983): 68-69.
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Books
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